

**Chapter 10**  
**"Frank-land":**  
**An Islamic View of the West**  
(1275-1276)  
Al-Qazwini

**Introduction**

Al-Qazwini (c. 1203-1283) ranks among the leading scientists of the thirteenth-century Muslim world. Most noted for his study of cosmology, he also wrote a comprehensive study of geography, *Athar al-bilad* (Monuments of Countries). Regular contact with westerners both through trade and warfare increased Islamic awareness of the "Franks," as they called them. Al-Qazwini, using a Hellenistic division of the world into seven climatic zones, begins by describing the weather in northern Europe and ends with a candid discussion of "Frankish" personal hygiene.

**Questions to Consider**

- How does this document suggest the kinds of contact most easterners encountered with westerners?
- How might differences in geography account for some cultural differences mentioned by Al-Qazwini?

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Frank-land, a mighty land and a broad kingdom in the realms of the Christians. Its cold is very great, and its air is thick because of the extreme cold. It is full of good things and fruits and crops, rich in rivers, plentiful of produce, possessing tillage and cattle, trees and honey. There is a wide variety of game there and also silver mines. They forge very sharp swords there, and the swords of Frank-land are keener than the swords of India.

Its people are Christians, and they have a king possessing courage, great numbers, and power to rule. He has two or three cities on the shore of the sea on this side, in the midst of the lands of Islam, and he protects them from his side. Whenever the Muslims send forces to them to capture them, he sends forces from his side to defend them. His soldiers are of mighty courage and in the hour of combat do not even think of flight, rather preferring death. But you shall see none more filthy than they. They are a people of perfidy and mean character. They do not cleanse or bathe themselves more than once or twice a year, and then in cold water, and they do not wash their garments from the time they put them on until they fall to pieces. They shave their beards, and after shaving they sprout only a revolting stubble. One of them was asked as to the shaving of the beard, and he said, "Hair is a superfluity. You remove it from your private parts, so why should we leave it on our faces?"